

VZCZCXRO6359
OO RUEHIK RUEHPW RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #0892 1040555
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 130555Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3565
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 000892

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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A
STATE FOR IO/RHS DOUGLAS ROHN AND REBECCA JOVIN
STATE FOR DRL AMY SCHMISSEUR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MFA'S DEMARCHE ON AFGHANISTAN'S UNOHCHR CANDIDATE

¶1. (SBU) MFA Minister Spanta called in Charg to inform him that Afghanistan wants Dr. Sima Samar, currently Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), to be considered as candidate for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR). Spanta used his meeting with Assistant Secretary Boucher on April 12 to reiterate his appeal for U.S. support for Samar's candidacy. The Foreign Minister highlighted to both the Charg and Assistant Secretary Boucher that Samar being selected would be good for Afghanistan, good for human rights, good for the UN, and good for the West. He told the Charg he was meeting with all other missions to ask for support for her candidacy. Charg and Assistant Secretary Boucher assured Spanta that the U.S. would give serious consideration to her candidacy.

¶2. (SBU) Spanta underlined his strong personal support for her candidacy, noting she is "Muslim, female, pro-democracy, and a friend of the West." He summarized Samar's qualifications. She is a trained physician who fled to Pakistan after her husband was killed by the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan. Following 17 years in exile, where she ran a regional NGO, Samar served as Vice-President during the Interim Administration of Afghanistan and was elected Vice-Chair of the Loya Jirga Assembly. She was Afghanistan's first Minister of Women's Affairs before President Karzai asked her to Head the AIHRC. She has since worked as UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation in Sudan.

¶3. (SBU) SRSG Kai Eide was also approached by Spanta and, according to Deputy SRSG, gave the Foreign Minister a positive response. UNAMA has been a strong supporter of Samar's candidacy from the beginning. They say her work as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights for Sudan (since August 2005) has been very effective despite trying circumstances. UNAMA's only secondary concern is who would replace her as head of the AIHRC. But, as they note, several of the younger AIHRC commissioners are viewed as very good candidates of very high calibre for the position.

¶4. (SBU) As head of the AIHRC, Samar has proven herself to be both a strong advocate of human rights and a savvy political operator. She has continued to be an effective voice for human rights in Afghanistan, even in the face of sometimes vicious opposition from opponents, including warlords with deplorable human rights records who are now entrenched in Parliament. While these opponents would be happy to see her outside of Afghanistan, her being named as Commissioner would represent a commitment by Afghanistan to human rights that would reinforce the efforts of the AIHRC here.

¶5. (SBU) Samar's bio, which was passed to us by the MFA, has

been sent to the Desk via email.
DELL